

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CPR-01 L-02 SS-15 NSC-05 SCA-01 PER-01

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FM AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4711

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BUJUMBURA 0134

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PDIP, BY

SUBJECT: RESTRICTIONS ON DIPLOMATIC TRAVEL

REF STATE 41552

SUMMARY. FOLLOWING FORMAL EMBASSY PROTEST ON TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS, ANGRY INTERIOR MINISTER, TAKING ADVANTAGE OF FONMIN'S ABSENCE FROM COUNTRY, SENT US NOTE ON FEB 15 FABRICATING ALLEGED PAST INCIDENTS DURING TRAVELS IN INTERIOR AND STATING NO FURTHER TRAVEL PERMISSION WOULD BE GRANTED. VIGOROUS INFORMAL ACTION BY EMBASSY OFFICERS WITH WELL-PLACED BARUNDI AND FOREIGNERS TO SPREAD WORD ABOUT SERIOUSNESS OF SITUATION CULMINATED IN MY THREE HOUR CONVERSATION FEB 20 WITH ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF (SECOND IN IMPORTANCE ONLY TO PRESIDENT) AND WITH FATHER BARAKANA, WHO REMAINS MICOMBERO'S CONFIDANT. PRESIDENT HAD CLEARLY AUTHORIZED THEM TO TAKE ACTION, AND THEY EXPRESSED SATISFACTION AFTER THIS LONG TALK THAT OTHERWISE REGRETTABLE TRAVEL IMBROGLIO HAD HAD THE UNFORESEEN VALUE OF CLEARING AIR ON US-BURUNDI RELATIONS. AFTER EVIDENT REAFFIRMATION BY MICOMBERO OF SUPPORT FOR DECISION BY HIS CHIEF AIDES TO BACKTRACK, FONMIM CALLED ME IN FEB 25 TO DISAVOW MOST OF WHAT HAD GONE ON, AND TO ANNUL INSULTING FEB 15 NOTE. NEW AND MUCH MORE GENEROUS GUIDELINES HAVE BEEN PROMISED TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS AFTER FONMIN RETURNS MARCH 3 FROM LOME MEETING TO SIGN NEW EC-ACP ACCORD. IT IS VERY WHOLESOME POLITICAL SIGN THAT INTERIOR MINISTER RWURI HAS BEEN OVERRULED IN THIS AFFAIR, AND THAT BASIS FOR BILATERAL US-BURUNDI COOPERATION HAS

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O BEEN STRENGTHENED. END SUMMARY.

1. AFTER SUBMITTING STRONG PROTEST NOTE FEB 05 (AIRGRAM 06), WE LEARNED FROM VARIOUS SOURCES THAT FONMIN AND OTHERS WERE TAKEN ABACK BY SERIOUSNESS WITH WHICH WE VIEWED THEIR TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS. UNFORTUNATELY, OUR INFORMAL SOUNDINGS WITH IMPORTANT REGIME PERSONALITIES WERE INITIALLY STYMIED BY ILLNESS OF PRESIDENT MICOMBERO

(FEB 12 TO 18), DURING WHICH NO DECISIONS COULD BE TAKEN. THUS, FONMIN LEFT FOR ADDIS ON FEB 14 WITHOUT HAVING MADE KNOWN ANY OFFICIAL REACTION; AND INTERIOR MINISTER, WHO ACTS FOR FONMIN WHEN LATTER ABSENT, SAW HIS CHANCE ON FEB 15 TO SEND ME PERSONALLY ACCUSATORY NOTE. IT CAME IN RESPONSE TO THREE EARLIER FORMAL AMEMBASSY REQUESTS FOR TRAVEL AUTHORIZATIONS, AND IT SAID THAT SINCE, DURING "ALL THE TIMES" OF PRIOR AUTHORIZATIONS, INCIDENTS HAD BEEN PRODUCED WITH PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES, INCLUDING MY OWN FEB 01 TRIP TO MURAMVYA PROVINCE (PARA 4, BUJUMBURA 84), THE MINISTRY HAD DECIDED TO SUSPEND ALL AUTHORIZATIONS UNTIL AFTER FURTHER INQUIRY. IN FACT, OF COURSE, THERE HAD ONLY BEEN ONE SINGLE AUTHORIZATION, AND THERE HAD NEVER BEEN ANY "INCIDENTS), BUT ONLY A FAIRLY FRIENDLY CHAT BETWEEN ME AND THE GOVERNOR OF MURAMVYA ON FEB 01. MY FORMAL RESPONSE TO THIS ACTION BY RWURI CAME ON FEB 18 WHEN, AGAIN IN WRITING, I REQUESTED AUDIENCE WITH FONMIN AFTER LATTER'S RETURN TO CLARIFY OBVIOUS ERRORS IN MINISTRY'S NOTE OF FEB 15.

2. MY INFORMAL RESPONSE INVOLVED MEETINGS WITH MICOMBERO CONFIDANTS- ON FEB 15 WITH BANKER KASHIRAHAMWE, ON FEB 16 WITH FATHER BARAKANA, AND ON FEB 20 WITH COLONEL NDABEMEYE AND BARAKANA. IN BETWEEN, I CONSULTED WITH FRENCH, GERMAN AND BELGIAN AMBASSADORS, WHO GAVE ME CONFLICTING ADVICE AND REPEATED EARLIER STATEMENTS THAT, SINCE THEIR EMBASSIES WERE DE FACTO EXEMPTED FROM RESTRICTIONS, THEY WOULD SIT TIGHT. ZAIRE AMB, WHO HAD ALSO BEEN SINGLED OUT BY RWURI, SENT FORMAL PROTEST (AS DID RWANDAN COLLEAGUE), AND IS NOW AWAITING SESSION WITH PRESIDENT ON THIS AND OTHER ISSUES BOTHERING BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP. ALL OTHER U.S. EMBASSY OFFICERS USED SOCIAL AND BUSINESS OCCASIONS TO SPREAD WORD IN TOWN ABOUT SERIOUS VIEW WHICH WE TOOK OF TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS AND OF THEIR DISCRIMINATORY APPLICATION TO U.S. EMBASSY AND ABOUT HARMFUL EFFECTS WHICH COULD ENSUE FOR BILATERAL COOPERATION.

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3. THE LONG TALKS WITH NDABEMEYE AND BARAKANA ALLOWED A THOROUGH AND VERY FRANK REVIEW OF AMERICAN OFFICIAL ATTITUDES TOWARD BURUNDI. I DISMISSED AS UTTER NONSENSE THE IDEA (WHICH I KNOW RWURI HAS BEEN PROPAGATING TO SOME PEOPLE) THAT THE US WOULD LIKE TO OVERTURN THE TUTSI REGIME AND INSTALL A HUTU GOVERNMENT, AND I MADE THE POINT THAT THE US HAS NO REASON EVEN TO DREAM IN SUCH TERMS, BECAUSE IT HAS

ALMOST NO INTERESTS HERE AT PRESENT. BESIDES, WHILE WE DEPLORED PAST KILLINGS IN BURUNDI, THE PAST WAS HISTORY, AND WE KNOW THAT THERE WAS NO ALTERNATIVE TO THE PRESENT REGIME, EVEN THOUGH WE MUCH HOPED, FOR HUMANITARIAN REASONS, THAT THE DOMINANT TUTIS WOULD COME TO SEE THEIR OWN INTEREST IN LONG-TERM CONCILIATION WITH THE HUTUS. THUS, THE REAL QUESTION CURRENTLY WAS WHETHER THE REGIME WOULD BE RATIONAL, MODERATE, AND FAR-SIGHTED, OR WHETHER IT WOULD TURN HARD-LINE AND XENOPHOBIC. THE OUTCOME OF THE FUSS OVER TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS COULD BE A MAJOR CLUE TO THE REGIME'S VIEW OF BURUNDI'S FUTURE--INWARD OR OUTWARD LOOKING, COOPERATING WITH THE WORLD OR ISOLATING ITSELF, STRIVING TOWARD AN INTEGRATED

SOCIETY OR RETURNING TO THE SIEGE MENTALITY OF 1972. RWURI HAD BECOME A SYMBOL OF RETROGRESSION.

4. I ALSO USED THE OCCASION TO SPEAK OF DILATORY BURUNDI BEHAVIOR ON SELF-HELP PROJECTS AND ON THE POSSIBLE PRESENCE OF THE PEACE CORPS, AND I NOTED THAT BURUNDI'S OVERALL REPUTATION COULD INFLUENCE THE WILLINGNESS OF FOREIGN INVESTORS TO RISK HUGE SUMS FOR NICKEL DEVELOPMENT. I ALSO DEPLORED AT LENGTH BURUNDI'S TOTAL ALIGNMENT AGAINST US ON POLITICAL ISSUES AT UNGA, IN CONTRAST TO NEUTRALITY ON SOME ISSUES BY BURUNDI'S NEIGHBORS (RWANDA, ZAIRE, KENYA, AND CAR), AND SAID THAT THIS ALSO DISTURBED MANY PEOPLE IN WASHINGTON.

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CPR-01 L-02 SS-15 SCA-01 NSC-05 PER-01

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R 261200Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4712

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5. IN COURSE OF ENSUING DISCUSSION, BOTH MEN AFFIRMED THAT MICOMBERO WAS DETERMINED TO HOLD TO A MODERATE AND CONCILIATORY COURSE. THEY SPOKE FRANKLY ABOUT RWURI'S

INTELLIGENCE AND ABILITIES, BUT NOTED THAT HE WAS BULL-HEADED, IMPETUOUS, INCONSIDERATE, AND VERY DIFFICULT EVEN FOR THEM TO WORK WITH. THE NOTE SENT ME ON FEB 15 HAD BEEN "MALADROIT" AND "MALICIOUS", AND THERE WOULD OBVIOUSLY HAVE TO BE CHANGES IN THE TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS. THEY DEPLORED THE CONFRONTATION THAT HAD ARISEN, BUT SUGGESTED THAT EVERY CLOUD HAS A SILVER LINING, SINCE OTHERWISE THE HIGHLY USEFUL CONVERSATION, WHICH COULD ONLY LEAD TO BETTER BILATERAL UNDERSTANDING, WOULD NEVER HAVE TAKEN PLACE.; AS I LEFT, THEY SAID THEY WOULD DECIDE THAT EVENING ON A "PLAN OF ACTION" TO RECTIFY THE SITUATION.

6. ON FEB 25, BARAKANA CALLED TO SAY THAT THE NECESSARY CONTACTS HAS BEEN MADE (UNDOUBTEDLY WITH MICOMBERO) AND THAT EVERYTHING WOULD NOW BE ALL RIGHT. TWO HOURS EARLIER FONMIN HAD CALLED ME IN AND ANNOUNCED A CHANGE IN THEIR TRAVEL POLICY. FIRST, HE SAID THAT HE HAD ALWAYS BEEN PERSONALLY AGAINST TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS; IN FACT, EVER SINCE HE HAD SUFFERED FROM THEM WHILE AMBASSADOR TO KINSHASA. BURUNDI HAD ITS DEFECTS, BUT IT HAD NOTHING TO HIDE, AND THE COUNTRY COULD HARDLY GO ON TREATING DIPLOMATS AS DANGEROUS PEOPLE AND THEN EXPECT THEIR GOVERNMENTS TO EXPAND COOPERATION WITH, AND AID TO, BURUNDI. SECOND, THE NOTE TO ME OF FEBRUARY 15 SHOULD BE CONSIDERED CANCELLED. IT WAS NOT THE BUSINESS OF THE INTERIOR MINISTRY TO SEND COMPLAINTS
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TO EMBASSIES OR TO SPEAK OF "INCIDENTS". AFTER ALL, DIPLOMATS KNEW THEIR RIGHTS, AND IF THEY HAD ANY COMPLAINTS, THEY COULD TAKE THE INITIATIVE. HE ACCEPTED MY ASSURANCE THAT US OFFICIALS HAD HAD NO CONTACTS WITH PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES EXCEPT FOR MY ONE CHAT WITH THE MURAMVYA GOVERNOR. THIRD, HE WOULD NOT TOLERATE DISCRIMINATION AMONG DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS. ALL WOULD BE TREATED EQUALLY, AND IT HAD BEEN INADMISSIBLE TO TELL THE AMERICAN EMBASSY THAT IT COULD NOT TRAVEL AROUND BURUNDI. HE SAID THAT NEW GUIDELINES WOULD BE GIVEN TO ALL MISSIONS SOON, SINCE HE WOULD ISSUE INSTRUCTIONS TO HIS STAFF AS SOON AS HE RETURNED FROM LOME ON MARCH 3. I THANKED HIM FOR HIS REASONABLE ATTITUDE

AND USED THE OCCASION TO REMIND HIM OF THE INACTION OF BURUNDI OFFICIALDOM (EXCEPT AGRICULTURE MINISTRY) ON OUR MODEST AID PROPOSALS. HE PROMISED TO TRY TO SPEED REPLIES, BUT NOTED AGAIN THAT TWO OF THE THREE SENIOR JOBS IN THE MINISTRY BENEATH HIM ARE STILL VACANT.

7. ALTHOUGH FONMIN BIMAZUBUE DID NOT INDICATE THE PRECISE CHANGES WHICH HE WILL MAKE IN TRAVEL RULES, HIS EXPRESSED DISLIKE OF THEM AND HIS OTHER REMARKS MAKE ME THINK THAT WE WILL RETURN MORE OR LESS TO THE STATUS QUO ANTE, PROBABLY

WITH THE NEED FOR SPECIFIC TRAVEL AUTHORIZATIONS DROPPED, AND
WITH THE RETENTION, AT MOST, OF SOME SORT OF INFORMAL
NOTIFICATION FOR MORE DISTANT TRIPS OR FOR THOSE INVOLVING
OFFICIAL CONTACTS.

ALTHOUGH THIS EMBASSY HAS HAD 3 ANXIOUS
WEEKS, THE DENOUEMENT HAS MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE POWERS
THAT BE IN BURUNDI DO INDEED VALUE, AND WILL TAKE SOME STEPS

TO KEEP, DECENT RELATIONS WITH THE US, AND ARE WILLING TO
BRIDLE IRRESPONSIBLE AND EXTREMIST OFFICIAL SUCH AS RWURI

WHO THREATEN BURUNDI'S IMAGE ABROAD. THUS, I FEEL
CONSIDERABLY ENCOURAGED ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR BILATERAL
COOPERATION IN THE NEAR FUTURE, EVEN WHILE REMEMBERING
THAT THE REAL DIFFICULTIES OF WORKING WITH THIS SOCIETY ARE
AS
ENDEMIC AS IS THE PERSISTENT DILEMMA OF HOW TO FIND
A PEACEFUL LONG-TERM SOLUTION TO THE ETHNIC CONFRONTATION
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IN BURUNDI.
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Message Attributes

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